DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 235 256 UD 023 070

TITLE A Study of Children At-Risk.
INSTITUTION Montgomery County Public Schools, Rockville, Md.
PUB DATE 83
NOTE 37p.; Some tables are marginally legible.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; *Access to Education; *Blacks; *Educational Discrimination; Elementary Secondary Education; Extracurricular Activities; Gifted; *Hispanic Americans; *Low Income Groups; Racial Discrimination; Scores; Special Education; Suspension
IDENTIFIERS *Montgomery County Public Schools MD

ABSTRACT

For many Black and Hispanic students, and especially low-income minority students, attending Montgomery County Public Schools (Rockville, Maryland) in the hope of getting a good education is a risky proposition at best, and may be seriously detrimental to their educational and personal development at the very worst. This conclusion was reached by the Citizen's Minority Relations Monitoring Committee (CMRMC) on the basis of study and analysis of the Montgomery County school system. CMRMC's report concentrates on four areas of concern. In the area of learning and testing, reading and math scores for the aggregate improved from 1981 to 1982 (as measured by the California Achievement Test), but Black and Hispanic students tested at very low levels compared with White and Asian students. Black students tested at the very bottom of the entire student population, in every subject area for every grade level. Furthermore, more than half of all Black and Hispanic ninth-grade students failed the basic math competency test during the 1982-83 school year. In the area of management of student behavior, suspensions occurred much more frequently with Black students than with White students. In the area of extracurricular activities, minority student participation was below that of other students. Finally, minority students were denied a fair and equitable opportunity to participate in the Gifted and Talented Program. CMRMC sees little chance of improvement in the situation without massive pressure from the minority community. (CMG)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED235256

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. Hymes
Montgomery County Public Schools
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

A STUDY OF

CHILDREN AT-RISK

A Report by the
Citizen's Minority Relations Monitoring Committee
on
The Montgomery County (Md.) Board of Education
and
The Montgomery County Public Schools
For 1982-83

UD 023 070

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction.....	1
II.	Selected Educational Issues -- Affecting Minority Students.....	5
III.	Learning, Testing and Minority Students.....	6
IV.	Managing Student Behavior: Suspensions.....	14
V.	Minority Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities.....	19
VI.	Another Look at the Gifted and Talented Program.	24
VII.	Recommendations.....	28
VIII.	Conclusions.....	32

I. Introduction

For many Black and Hispanic students, especially those from families with low incomes, attending Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in the hope of getting a good education is a risky proposition at best, and may be seriously detrimental to their educational and personal development at the very worst. This is the conclusion reached by the Citizen's Minority Relations Monitoring Committee (CMRMC) as a result of its study and analyses of the policies developed by the Board of Education (BOE) over the two most recent years, the administration of the school system at all levels of the bureaucracy by those responsible for implementing policy directives, and as reflected in the academic achievement of the students. This conclusion has also been reached by other observers of the Montgomery County educational system.

During the 1982-83 school year, the CMRMC obtained a broad-based cross section of data on the performance of students and the school system, although it was some what more difficult to do since the November 1982 election than was the case previously. The CMRMC, with the help of interested community groups, conducted surveys in selected schools, obtaining information from students, staff and teachers, visited homes and talked with parents and students, all for the purpose of gaining a clearer insight into the perceived effectiveness of the school system in serving the educational needs of students at all grade levels, particularly minority youngsters.

In addition to getting an accurate reading on performances during 1982-83, the CMRMC also felt it was important to determine whether any real and quantifiable progress had been made in the school system's ability to meet the educational needs of all minority students since the findings of its 1981-82 school year report were released in May 1982. The earlier report showed significant differences in the manner in which the system deals with Hispanic and Black students, and the academic achievements of these students in the aggregate, from the remainder of the school population. No one has made a convincing case to the contrary. It was a clearly established fact that in the realm of the total educational experience, Black and Hispanic students were subjected to special, or maybe a more appropriate description should -- not so special treatment. One important question for the Committee was, how much has that changed?

In an effort to be fair in its assessment of the MCPS during the school year 1982-83, the CMRMC sought out every conceivable data and information source available. In the final analysis, the school system itself proved to be the best hard data source and the numbers obtained therefrom constitute the foundation on which this paper is developed.

As a result of its work during the 1982-83 school year and especially its contact with parents, the CMRMC takes the position that the issue of education for many Hispanic and Black students in Montgomery County Public Schools has reached "crisis proportions". One good indication of the crisis can be seen in the report that sixty-six (66) percent of Black and fifty-eight (58) percent of Hispanic ninth grade students in MCPS failed the state-mandated mathematics competency exam given in the fall of 1982.[1] As serious as these numbers are, the CMRMC has good reason to believe that they are just the "tip of the iceberg".

The education of Black and Hispanic children in MCPS, especially those from low-income family circumstances has become such a serious problem that in one sense it is difficult to understand why the parents of many students who are achieving so poorly are not up in arms individually if not collectively over the failure of the system to minimally prepare their children to be educationally competent people. On the other hand, it may be understandable that these parents do not engage the system and try to find ways to make it accountable for its failures. After all the school system is quite large and impersonal, with immense (public) resources undergirding it, and ample high-priced legal help at its disposal, in addition to a formidable bureaucracy whose primary obligation is perceived as being to the more affluent segment of the county's population. A sizable proportion of the students who are most in need of help while getting the least, come from families whose primary attention is given to such matters as providing minimally for the family's subsistence. Besides, how can ordinary parents, unlikely to have a professional educational background deal effectively with highly trained professional educators? That is one question raised repeatedly by parents who had occasion and cause to deal with MCPS concerning their child.

The purpose of this paper is to take a concise and comprehensive look at a number of important questions which bear on the subject of educating Hispanic and Black children, such as: (1) Why do so many students do so poorly academically in Montgomery County Public Schools? (2) Why do so many of them

1/ The Washington Post, "Majority of Blacks, Hispanics Fail Montgomery Math Test" June 22, 1983, P. C-1.

fail to pass basic competency tests? (3) Do the policy-makers and administrators understand the problems facing these students? (4) Is the lack of progress in correcting the problems due to an unwillingness or inability to do something about them, or are there other reasons? etc.

It is hoped that this paper will not end up as the 1981-82 report did, and that was simply as a discussion piece. The preferred choice of the CMRMC is to have this paper become an action document. Clearly, it would be most desirable to have the policy-makers and policy-implementers use facets of the paper as basis for changing some of the inequities in the system. However, if they are again unwilling or unable to do so, our hope is that a coalition of community-based organizations in an alliance with parents will see the basis for change within this document, and will move with some dispatch, doing whatever is necessary to bring it about.

In an effort to obtain answers to the many questions concerning the apparent inability of MCPS to provide a quality education to many minority students, the CMRMC will again analyze the data in selected priority areas of educational activity. Most of the areas discussed in this paper will be similar to the ones studied during the 1981-82 school year. Although this was not the Committee's intention at the beginning of the 1982-83 school year, there are advantages in studying content areas which were studied in previous years. One very important advantage is that it provides a yardstick against which progress or the lack of it can be measured. That is precisely what we did in this paper.

The principal concerns of this study will be the areas of testing, extracurricular activities, suspensions and the gifted and talented program. It should be noted that the Committee began its work during the 1982-83 school year with the intention of studying policy and practice in several other areas such as special education and ability grouping. Unfortunately, getting data in those areas was a very difficult task. Both proved to be very tough areas to penetrate. We will try another time.

Another issue which the CMRMC felt it was important to explore was, "what makes some schools good learning environments for minority students, and other schools not so good". And, to carry this question one step further, what enables some administrators and teachers to be effective in working with minority students and others such abject failures. But of

course, inquiry into such issues is complex and involved even for highly trained educators, to say nothing of a group of parents. Such a task was far beyond the resources of the CMRMC, but the hope is that some other interested and well-prepared organization will try to find answers to these important questions.

There are usually many questions which the CMRMC would like to raise in an effort to understand where the educational process goes wrong for so many minority students. As is true in so many important areas of human endeavor, there are usually more questions than answers. This has certainly been the case ever since the Committee began its inquiry into the MCPS. Nonetheless, the CMRMC, along with many others, must continue to raise the most searching questions possible about the system and the way it serves students, and immediately join the search for answers.

Finally, it may well be that the biggest challenge will be in getting the community to help find answers and solutions to the problems of an educational system unable to educate many minority children. The CMRMC takes the position that every parent, even if his or her child is an honor student, should be concerned enough to give time, energy and other resources to this problem. The failures are as much a community problem as they are an individual problem.

II. Selected Educational Issues -- Affecting Minority Students

The Montgomery County Public School System is legally obligated to educate a broad heterogeneous group of young people covering a wide spectrum in terms of age, ability, economic backgrounds, race and ethnicity. The hope of many interested people is that the system will do quite well in addressing the needs of young people who enter it, regardless of background. Unfortunately, that is not the case. Far too often, MCPS are not able to effectively address the educational needs of all of its student. Also regretably, the highest concentration of students the systems seems unable to serve adequately are minorities. As is true of any organization, and especially one as large and as complex as the MCPS system, decisions are made continously on a wide range of matters having to do with its primary mission -- the education of students. The decisions made range from the systemwide policy positions which may have a life span of several years, to the frequently made type of decision which may be limited in scope of impact and short-lived -- such as that made by a single teacher affecting one person in a class.

Regardless of the magnitude and impact of decisions made at differing levels, some are sound and well thought out while others are poorly conceived, badly executed and achieve a result of questionable value. But good, bad or indifferent, decisions are of necessity made, and within the MCPS, they affect to some degree the educational status of all who participate in the educational process.

It logically follows that most if not all of the decisions made within the system, policy and non-policy alike are important educational issues at the outset or get translated into major educational issues in the course of their implementation. Furthermore, within the system certain decisions have a greater impact on minority students than on the students in the majority population. Some of those decisions, and the educational issues which emanate from them are the matters we shall focus attention on during the discussions in this paper.

Of course the number of important educational issues, even those which can be clearly identified as affecting minority students negatively, is far too large to address in this paper. As in the past, the CMRMC has chosen to address those issues which can be considered highest priority -- those which are most critical in terms of their impact on the educational development of students in the system.

III. Learning, Testing and Minority Students

If the results of standardized tests administered by MCPS are valid indicators of their educational progress and status, the conclusion must be drawn that Black and Hispanic students are in very serious trouble. Periodically during the 1982-83 school year, there were news stories announcing that test scores of MCPS students were rising.[2/] But a close analysis of the report from which the news story was derived makes quite clear that there are more reasons to be distressed than pleased about the test results.

On the California Achievement Test (CAT) which was administered to grades 3, 5, 8 and 11 during the fall of 1982, MCPS students in the aggregate did improve their reading and mathematics scores over the scores received in 1981. Total test scores, including total language as well as total math and reading, also reflected an upward trend. A breakout of the scores by race shows that Black and Hispanic students tested at very low levels compared to White and Asian students. Of all the sub-populations tested, only 11th grade Black students scored below the national average (50th percentile) in reading and mathematics.[3/] Hispanic students experienced decreases in scores at all grade levels tested during 1982.[4/]

Much is generally made of the fact that MCPS students, including Black and Hispanics, score well above the national norm on standardized tests. Focusing on that fact may lead some persons to conclude that Black and Hispanic students on the whole are doing quite well. Nothing could be further from the truth. White and Asian students outscore Black and Hispanic students by very large amounts in every subject in which tests are administered, at every grade level, and have

2/ An example is the story which appeared in The Washington Post which stated that "Students' Test Scores Go Up in Montgomery County", March 15, 1983.

3/ Edward Andrews' Memorandum to the Board of Education, titled "Results from Fall 1982 Administration of the California Achievement Test", March 14, 1983, p. 2.

4/ Ibid.

been doing so every year during which the CAT has been used in MCPS. Therefore, no one should be lulled into a false sense of real progress due to slight improvements in the test results for Black students in some grades.

The major message which must be conveyed about the status and progress of these students is found in the graphic exhibits included in Mr. Andrews' memorandum to the Board of Education.[5/] Four of the five exhibits derived from the 1982 test results simply make the point that Black students tested at the very bottom of the entire student population, in every subject area for every grade level. That is indeed the shocking story to be seen in the following exhibits. Everything else is superfluous.

As can be readily seen in the exhibits, the scores reported for each subject area and for the total battery is the Normal Curve Equivalent (NCE). NCE's are equal interval scores on the vertical margin of the chart which makes it easier to compare results of various groups under study. In other words, a 10 point NCE change is the same at any point on the scale.

Beginning at grade 3 for 1980, and through grade 11 for 1982, for each area in which tests were administered, the exhibits clearly make the point that Black students are achieving at an abysmally low level, while Hispanics are achieving at a slightly higher level. The message, once again is that the school system in Montgomery County is not meeting the educational needs of many of its minority students.

Further evidence of the failure of MCPS to adequately meet the educational needs of Hispanic and Black students is found in the results from the 1982-83 Maryland Functional Mathematics Test, which was administered to every seventh

5/ Ibid.

EXHIBIT 2

CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TESTS TRENDS BY RACE

GRADE 3, 1980-82

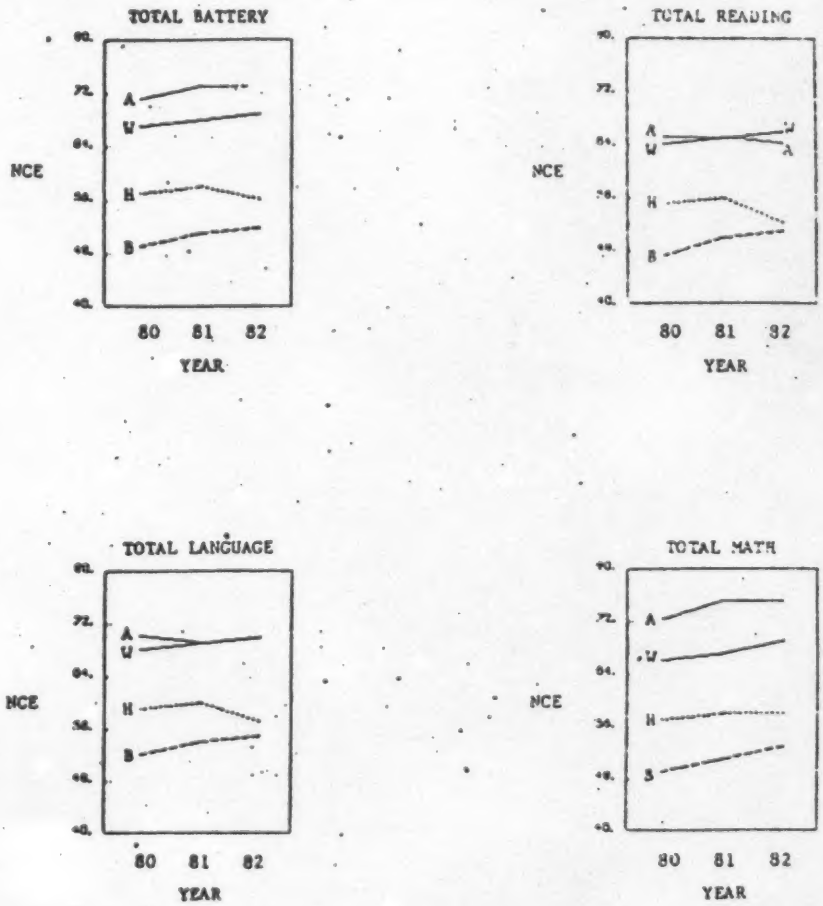
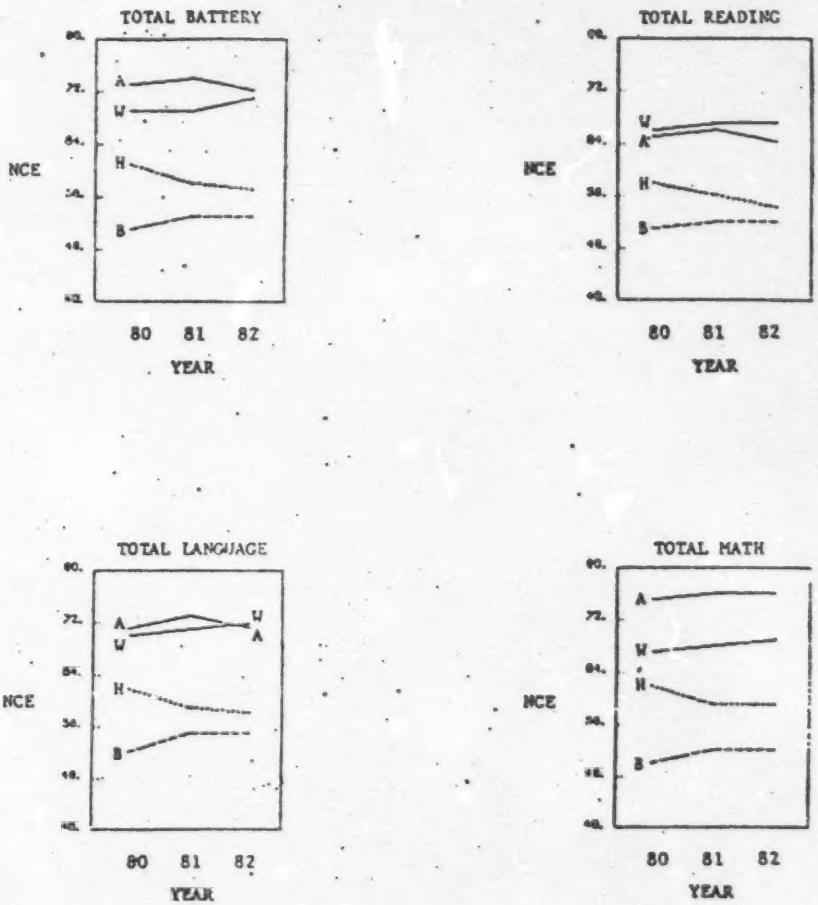


EXHIBIT 3

CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TESTS TRENDS BY RACE

GRADE 5, 1980-82

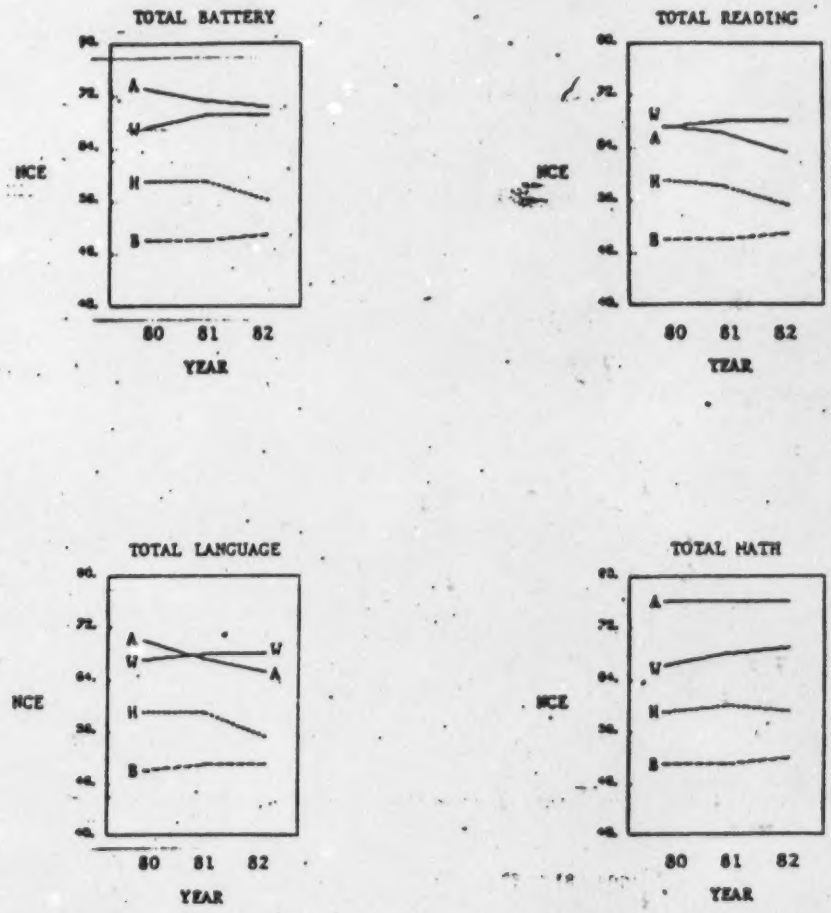


A - Asian,
B - Black
H - Hispanic
W - White

EXHIBIT 4

CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TESTS TRENDS BY RACE

GRADE 8, 1980-82

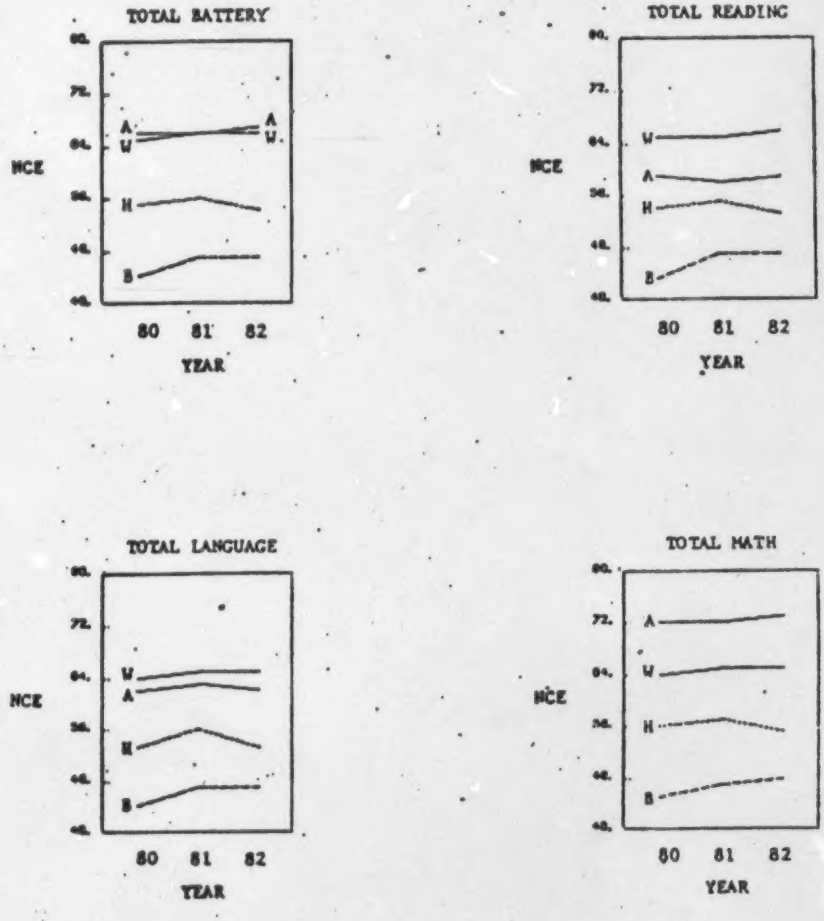


(13)

EXHIBIT 5

CALIFORNIA ACHIEVEMENT TESTS TRENDS BY RACE

GRADE 11, 1980-82



and ninth grade student in Maryland Public Schools. The test is a part of the Maryland State Education Department's Project Basic, and will be a graduation requirement for the class of 1987 and thereafter. Slightly more than 7,500 ninth graders in MCPS took the test and 65 percent passed it. The following chart indicates the percentage of students who passed the test by race and ethnic origin.

Maryland Functional Math Test, Fall 1982
Percentage of MCPS Grade 9 Students Passing

	Asian	Black	Hispanic	White
Number Tested	475	904	349	5783
Percentage Achieving Passing Score	77	34	42	70

This chart is derived from Exhibit 1, Analysis of 1982-83 Maryland Functional Mathematics Test Results, MCPS, p. 3.

Only one-third of the Black 9th grade students in the school system had sufficient skills to pass the basic math test, while 42 percent of Hispanic ninth graders were successful. These test results must be alarming to every segment of the education community -- parents, students, teachers and administrators.

The CMRMC's preference is to say that the school system has failed rather than the students. It is difficult to conceive of two-thirds of any sub-population of students failing to pass a basic test in functional mathematics, if they have been properly taught the skills they are expected to acquire. It makes much more sense to say that the MCPS suffered a massive failure.

This conceivably is what former Superintendent of Schools Edward Andrews had in mind when he wrote the June 21, 1983 cover memorandum to the Board of Education on the "Maryland Functional Mathematics Test Results and Recommended Action Plan". The transmittal memorandum stated that "New approaches to math and science instruction in the upper elementary grades -- need to be seriously considered."[6/] A gross understatement if ever there was one.

6/ Edward Andrews' Memorandum to the Board of Education, forwarding an "Analysis of Maryland Functional Mathematics Test Results and Recommended Action Plan", June 21, 1983.

These test results simply confirm the fact that Black and Hispanic students are facing a problem of overwhelming dimensions. Not all of them, but a significant proportion of these students are attempting a difficult if not impossible task -- that is getting a quality education from a system which is not providing it. They are seriously "at-risk".

An interesting aspect of this analysis is that the results are essentially the same as presented by CMRMC last year. The failures in the system are fundamentally the same as those identified last year, the year before that -- ad infinitum. Therefore, the CMRMC reiterates several important questions:

1. Why does the system fail so miserably?

2. How long will the parents of the young people who are being shortchanged meekly accept the failures?

3. How can highly trained professional educators continue to be a party to this abject failure?

4. Do other taxpayers (business, etc.) understand that these failures have long-term costs attached for them? Etc.

IV. Managing Student Behavior: Suspensions

No where is the Montgomery County Public School System more vulnerable to the charge of being "unfair" in dealing with its students than in the manner in which it manages student behavior. The gross disparity in the handling of student disciplinary matters was discussed in the report prepared by the CMRMC in 1982 and by the Board appointed Minority Relations Monitoring Committee (MRMC) in its 1981 report. It is indeed sad to say that the suspension portion of the discipline program is as imbalanced as ever. The school system in the aggregate performed as poorly as ever during the 1981-82 school year, the most recent period for which data are available. Furthermore, there is no reason to hope that the suspension numbers for the 1982-83 school year will reflect any significant improvement when they become available.

The evidence supports the position taken by the CMRMC which is that MCPS seem to allow race and ethnicity to become crucial determinants in managing student behavior. Suspensions occur much more frequently with Black students than with White students. One question which needs answering is simply "why". Another question which deserves an answer is "why is the school system unable to correct this critical problem?".

From a report entitled Number of Pupils Suspended (once or more) by Race by School - 1979-80, 1980-81, 1981-82 School Year,7/ it is quite easy again to see the degree to which race/ethnicity seem to be a factor in determining how the system solves its discipline problem. For example, of the 47 Junior, Middle and Senior high schools which operated during 1981-82, the suspension of White students as a percentage of enrollment exceeded that of Black students in only three of the schools, Belt and Hoover Junior High Schools, and Einstein Senior High School. In all of the remaining 44 schools, Black suspensions exceeded the percentage of white students suspended once or more, and in many instances by very large percentages.

7/ Montgomery County Public Schools, Department of Educational Accountability, July 21, 1982.

The following are Senior High School Suspension Percentages as taken from the table cited above:

Black and White Students Suspended (once or more)
1981-82 School Year

School	Percentage of Enrollment	
	Black (Non-Hispanic)	White (Non-Hispanic)
Area 1		
Blair High	20.6	9.1
Einstein High	8.5	8.8
Kennedy High	6.2	4.5
Northwood High	20.8	10.7
Paint Branch High	17.1	5.9
Sherwood High	25.2	7.3
Springbrook	4.3	2.1
Wheaton High	26.4	11.5
Area 2		
Bethesda Chevy Chase High	27.2	9.4
Churchill High	13.9	2.5
Walter Johnson High	13.7	3.9
R. Montgomery High	14.9	7.8
Peary High	18.4	3.8
Rockville High	23.3	11.3
W. Whitman High	3.8	1.4
Woodward High	18.5	4.0
Area 3		
Damascus High	15.4	6.8
Gaithersburg High	34.6	12.3
Magruder High	30.6	7.9
Poolesville Jr/Senior High	22.5	14.6
Senaca Valley High	18.7	8.0
Wootton High	13.2	4.0

Clearly the difference in suspension rates of White and Black students in many of the Senior High schools is so broad as to constitute a serious threat to the opportunity for an equal education. Furthermore, the incidence of suspensions by race across the system refutes the frequently advance argument of randomness -- that just by chance the numbers seem to fall that way. Instead, the CMRMC sees a clear pattern which

requires a different explanation. Stated differently, the Committee believes that legal research will validate the basis for a "class-action" effort on the part of Black parents to change what can only be described as student behavior management prejudicial to the best educational interest of this minority sub-population in MCPS.

The size of the variations in suspension rates by race was as large in many of the 25 Junior High Middle Schools as for the worst of the 22 Senior High Schools. As was reported in 1982 by the CMRMC, the most flagrant differences in suspensions by race at the Junior High School level are again to be found in Area 3. The following chart cites some of the most flagrant differences in rates during the two most recent years for which numbers were available when this report was written.

Black and White Pupils Suspended (once or more)
1980-81 and 1981-82 School Years[8/]

Area III Junior High Schools	Percent of Enrollment			
	1980-81		1981-82	
	Black (Non-Hispanic)	White (Non-Hispanic)	Black (Non-Hispanic)	White (Non-Hispanic)
Baker Jr.	26.5	5.2	36.7	4.5
Ridgeview Jr.	22.9	15.3	28.3	19.8
Redland Middle	18.3	4.6	34.2	5.4

It could be concluded that not much has been learned about managing student behavior over the past few years in these Area III Junior High Schools or in several Senior High Schools in the same administrative jurisdiction. Not only are the suspension rate differences by race quite wide, but in the instances cited here as well as other instances, they are growing wider.

8/ Ibid.

In addition to the questions raised earlier in this section of the paper, the CMRMC would like to have answers to the following questions. Furthermore, it believes that school policy makers and school administrators at both the central office and area office levels should also want answers to the following questions.

1. Why is such a large percentage of Black students suspended in so many MCPS?

2. What are the causes for most frequent decisions to suspend?

3. How much does racial bias and prejudice enter into suspension decisions?

4. Is the behavior of Black students really so much worse than that of White students?

5. What schools have been most effective in bringing fairness and equity into the disciplinary process? How did they achieve it?

6. Is the School System as helpless as it seems to be in this matter?

A special projects researcher on the topic of suspensions for the CMRMC[9/] conducted a structured interview of 17 MCPS principals from December 1982 through February 1983. Some of the conclusions reached in her paper are worth mentioning at this point in the report, such as:

> "the major task of the school is to provide a social milieu that encourages positive learning for all students...".[10/]
>
> "Negative learning occurs for students of MCPS as the suspension criteria and practices are implemented."[11/]
>
> "...Research studies show that high suspension rates among Black students inhibit them from benefitting from the school experience."[12/]

9/ Dr. Doris Nicholas of Howard University was appointed by the National Council of Negro Women to work with the CMRMC, and submitted a research paper on the subject of suspensions in March 1983.

10/ Ibid.

11/ Ibid.

12/ National Institute of Education. Minority Students: A Research Appraisal. Washington, D.C. 1977, p. 210

In the final section of her paper, Dr. Nicholas discussed the attitudes of MCPS administrators on the subject of Black student suspensions. From the interviews conducted with school principals, all of whom were selected from those schools showing a 10-20 percent difference in the percentage of Black versus White students suspended once or more during the 1981-82 school year, the following summary was derived:

> "All administrators interviewed stated that ethnic as well as socioeconomic factors were important variables in the suspension of Black students. In addition, academic achievement seems to contribute to behavior that establishes a predisposition to suspension."13/

And, if those opinions were not telling enough, the interviews furthermore revealed the belief among the administrators that: (1) Black students stand out, (2) there is a clash in the cultures of Black students and White teachers, (3) most of the students suspended were students with low-socioeconomic backgrounds, (4) students from low income families do not get along well with middle class students, and (5) their parents do not seem to be interested in the school experience.

These comments from persons in positions of responsibility in the school system and who have a major decision role to play in the matter of student discipline, provide perhaps the best insight to understanding why fairness and equitable handling of students are no further advanced than they are.

Finally, to reiterate a point made earlier, managing student behavior is a prerequisite for operating a good school or a good school system. Decorum and order are essential ingredients in any learning environment, especially where hundreds of even thousands of students are brought together. Unfortunately, MCPS seem to be missing a key ingredient for maintaining good discipline -- simply being fair. It is questionable whether the school system has the capacity to reform itself. It will be a long and costly struggle, but the CMRMC believes there is basis for a "class action" effort by parents which will stand an excellent chance of correcting this problem.

13/ Dr. Doris Nicholas, Special Research Project on Suspensions.

V. Minority Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities

A survey of selected Montgomery County Public Schools was conducted during the Spring of 1983 in the form of interviews of Awareness Club advisors and student leaders, for the purpose of getting their perceptions of the way the school system administers extracurricular activities and how students are affected.[14] The summary conclusions reached as a result of aggregating the survey information tend to validate the findings of the CMRMC as set forth in its 1982 report and the MRMC 1981 report.

Some of the conclusions drawn from the survey are as follows:

1. Minority students do not have easy access to many extracurricular activities;

2. Some students who worked after school believed that by virtue of their employment they were automatically excluded from extracurricular activities;

3. Many activities, especially non-athletic ones are in varying degrees, closed or had only limited access along racial or economic lines;

4. All students are affected by misinformation on extracurricular activities; and

5. Teacher and staff attitudes have a direct bearing on minority participation in many extracurricular activities.

Other important parts of the school survey results will be discussed later in this paper, but the views of this sample of faculty and students confirm the fact that this is a serious problem, which for all practical purposes has been ignored by both the BOE and the school administration. There can truthfully be no doubt any longer about the failure of MCPS in serving well the needs of its students in this adjunct portion of the overall education experience.

14/ Anna L. Persons was principal researcher and project director for the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority which collaborated with the CMRMC in doing the survey.

A report released by the Superintendent of Schools in January, 1983 provides a comprehensive look at student participation in extracurricular activities for the 1979-80, 1980-81 and 1981-82 school years.15/ Although users of the study are cautioned about making comparisons of participation rates across years, a clear picture does emerge about the manner in which the system serves the needs of students in athletic and non-athletic extracurricular activities.

About 27,000 students participated in at least one extracurricular activity according to the report, during the 1981-82 school year with participation rates being higher understandably, at the secondary than the elementary level.16/ But the following table which was taken in part from Table 2 in the report shows the degree of participation by race, at elementary and secondary school levels for athletic and non-athletic activities. What is particularly noteworthy is the low level of participation by Hispanic students at the elementary school level and for non-athletic activities at the secondary school level. Furthermore, the participation of Hispanic males in elementary schools (.077) and in non-athletic activities at the secondary level (.084) is inexcusably poor.

15/ Student Participation in Extracurricular Activities During the 1981-82 School Year, Department of Educational Accountability, 1982.

16/ Ibid, P. 1.

Percentage of Each Race Participating in Extracurricular Activities During the 1981-82 School Year[17]

Elementary Schools	Total Males and Females
White	.182
Black	.134
Asian	.121
Hispanic	.093
Secondary Schools	
(Athletic Activities)	
White	.276
Black	.292
Asian	.185
Hispanic	.220
(Non-Athletic Activities)	
White	.196
Black	.135
Asian	.160
Hispanic	.099

The CMRMC's analysis of student participation at the elementary school level is quite revealing. The following table shows the percentage of school enrollment by race during the three most recent years for which numbers are available.

Percentage of Elementary School Enrollment by Race[18]

School Years	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
1981-82	73.5	13.7	7.9	4.8
1980-81	76.0	12.9	6.8	4.1
1979-80	78.4	12.3	3.5	3.6

17/ Ibid, p. 6.

18/ Ibid.

The factors which are very obvious in reviewing the data for 1981-82 school year are: 1) Hispanic children are seriously under-represented in most extracurricular activities even during the elementary years. For example, their participation rate as a percentage of their population for band (1.4), chorus (2.0), gymnastics (1.9), math club (1.5, were all quite low, while their participation in the movie club (6.3), school store (5.7), audiovisual (5.4) and general services (11.1) were higher than their percentage of the total school population. But the basic conclusion to be drawn is that in the literary and more academic oriented areas, Hispanic students are seriously under-represented in the lower grades, but they are most heavily represented in non-content or non-subject matter related areas; 2) Black students on the other hand, who were 13.7 percent of the elementary school population during the 1981-82 school year were well represented in virtually every category of extracurricular activity. Their participation rates were very representative for the art club (13.1), band (14.1), chorus (14.2), gymnastics (13.4), math club (25.8) and the science club (27.3). Black students were poorly represented in non-academic areas such as school store (1.4), general services (0.0), movie club (0.0) and other similar activities. But the pattern changes once they become secondary school students.

The following numbers will show the percentage enrollment in secondary schools by race, and will provide the basis for understanding how minority student participation changes at that level of schooling.

Percentage of Secondary School Enrollment by Race[19/]

School Years	White	Black	Asian	Hispanic
1981-82	79.3	11.2	5.3	4.0
1980-81	81.3	10.5	4.5	3.5
1979-80	83.4	9.8	3.5	3.1

19/ Ibid, p. 14.

The 25.8 percent math club participation in the elementary grades for Black students becomes 2.9 percent at the secondary level and the 27.3 percent science club becomes 8.5 percent. As highlighted in CMRMC's report released in 1982, Black students are still grossly over-represented in a few athletic activities such as boys varsity basketball (39.9), varsity football (23.4), boys track (22.8), and girls track (16.3). On the other hand their numbers are still small in varsity baseball (6.7), boys gnmnastics (6.9), girls gymnastics (4.1), swimming (1.3), and varsity wrestling (2.7) -- just to identify a few of the athletic related activities. Overall Black student participation in student government, honor societies, literary and language clubs, and most intellectual extracurricular pursuits is atrociously poor.

Hispanic student participation in athletic and nonathletic honor, literary, student government and intellectual pursuits overall should be a matter of great embarrassment to MCPS. And the most recent numbers do not show any appreciable improvement over the two preceeding years. If there is a discernible trend it is negative.

In summary, there has not been any change of importance in this area of school activities for Black and Hispanic students from the report of last year. The alarm which was sounded over this matter and the recommendation made must have been ignored because the CMRMC has not seen any program activity which will change the system's dismal record in the area of extracurricular services to minority children. These services continue to be an important part of the total educational experience, and when they are denied to a significant part of the student population, overtly or covertly, the students are obviously shortchanged.

The Committee takes the position that the pattern of practices with regard to extracurricular activities is so severely unfair to Black and Hispanic students, that the practices have persisted for such a long time, and that these students are systemmatically being denied such an important part of their education, that a class action legal effort by parents and aggreived students is a logical choice which must be considered. To pursue such a remedy may be the appropriate response to such a serious injustice as is now perpetrated on this segment of the student population.

VI. Another Look at the Gifted and Talented Program

The Department of Educational Accountability is to be commended for the study it released in the summer of 1983 on serving gifted and talented children in Montgomery County Public Schools.[20] The study is one of the best of its kind prepared within the school system within recent memory, primarily because it dared to take a hard analytical look at a program and report accurately what it saw. It analyzed screening procedures, it identified program strengths and weaknesses, presented very important findings about effects on the student population, and made substantative recommendations for improving some of the program's serious deficiencies. It is gratifying to see an important issue dealt with from a position of honesty and forthrightness rather than denial, defensiveness and obsfuscation.

Two years ago when the Minority Relations Monitoring Committee stated that the Gifted and Talented Program was unfair in its effects on Black and Hispanic students if not its intent, some staff persons vociferously disagreed. But during a BOE meeting on April 28, 1983, it was acknowledged by staff that the program was not serving well the educational interests of Black and Hispanic students.

A study made during the 1978-79 school year showed strong biases at work against Black and Hispanic students, and the subsequent 1981-81 data also made the case that these students were denied a fair and equitable opportunity to participate in the program. The study released in June 1983 by the Department of Educational Accountability validates the earlier findings beyond any question. It is indeed a badly administered program.

In its 1982 report, the CMRMC pointed out that Black elementary students who were 12.1 percent of the school population represented only 4.8 percent of the gifted and talented program participants, and Hispanics who were 3.8 percent of

---

20/ The Study is titled Screening and Rescreening for the Gifted and Talented Program 1980-81 and 1981-82 School Year, Department of Educational Accountability, June 1983.

the population were only 1.0 of the participants. Furthermore, the CMRMC identified the screening process as the device through which subtle but effective discrimination was practiced. The process allowed for the "screening out" of some students and the "screening in" of others.

In the light of that history it is instructive to review some of the findings from the Department of Educational Accountability's June 1983 study.

Prominent among the points made by the study are the following:

1. There was a large increase in the percentage of students screened and selected for gifted and talented programs in 1980-81 (22 percent of the eligible population in schools examined), compared to 1979-80 (8 percent).21/
2. Inequities in the participation rates of different racial groups continue to exist. The increases in the 1980-81 expansion of students screened and selected benefitted Hispanics and Blacks less than Whites and Asians.22/
3. There was overwhelming reliance on test scores for selection of participants despite admonition to use them carefully.23/
4. Professional decision-making (teachers, staff, etc.) in 1980-81 screening assisted Asian and White the most, Blacks slightly less than Whites and Hispanics the least.24/

21/ Ibid, p. E-2.

22/ Ibid, p. E-2.

23/ Ibid, p. E-4.

24/ Ibid, p. E-4.

5. In rescreening, meaning the reassessment of students who had previously been screened and the screening of students new to a school whose classmates participated in earlier screening activities, many of the problems uncovered in the initial screening were also found. In the sample schools where the population was 11 percent Black, 4 percent of the Black students were selected for participation as a result of rescreening. A school population of 4 percent Hispanic students found 4 percent selected for participation. So Black students continue to be seriously under-represented.

The Department of Educational Accountability identified two major findings as a result of its work:

A. Implementation of the screening processes continues to be inconsistent across schools and diverges from the county-wide guidelines. The lack of consistency is even more severe where rescreening is involved. 26/

B. Despite efforts to include minority students in the screening pools, Blacks and Hispanics are not being selected for program participation in representative numbers.27/

Those two important findings led the Educational Accountability staff to question the screening approach which tries to achieve uniformity in its procedure depending largely on standardized achievement test instruments. It raises questions because it feels that there is no evidence that the present criterion of performance on standardized tests distinguishes adequately between students who can and those who cannot succeed in gifted and talented programs, that the standardized achievement test will prevent Black and Hispanic students from achieving more equitable representation in the program in the future, and that uniformity of

25/ Ibid, pps. E-5 and E-6.

26/ Ibid, p. E-6.

27/ Ibid, p. E-E.

implementation is difficult to achieve, and schools modify the screening procedure anyway, therefore, why not consider the possibility of giving schools greater flexibility in screening.28/

Finally, much to its credit the Department of Educational Accountability makes recommendations which conceivably could open the program to broader participation by Black and Hispanic students. At a minimum it is worth considering such recommended assessments as: (1) measures of creativity, (2) measures of specific content skills, and (3) "work samples designed to assess performance on tasks similar to those which the student will be dealing in the instructional program which will be provided".29/

It will probably not come as a surprise to anyone conversant with the issues involved in this matter that staff from the Gifted and Talented Program disagree with the recommendations of the Department of Educational Accountability. The several areas of their disagreement were set forth in an addendum to the June 1983 report.

CMRMC again wishes to commend DEA for its resourcefulness in identifying new approaches for addressing this problem. Of course it is not certain that what they are proposing will provide a long-term and significant solution to the problem, but at least they are saying let's try something different. Staff of the Gifted and Talented Program appears to take the position of putting all of its hopes in the Program of Assessment, Diagnosis, and Instruction (PADI). The CMRMC hopes that it works, but even if it does, operating in two schools for 18 months through June of 1983, and expanding to 6 more during the 1983-84 school year is a rate of progress which will be inadequate by any standard of measure.

28/ Ibid, p. E-6.

29/ Ibid, p. E-8.

VII. Recommendations

Developing sound recommendations for improving the educational outcomes for those minority students whose needs are not being met should be one of the highest priorities facing the MCPS system. However, simply developing recommendations, even good ones, is no guarantee that change for the better will take place. The CMRMC and its predecessor organization developed recommendations before which were worthy of consideration, but they were essentially ignored. Therefore, the Committee understands that making recommendations for change is only one part of the job -- getting them used is equally important.

After years of neglect, most of it not so benign, a proposal for change has been made by the President of the Board of Education in a memorandum to other members of the Board and the Superintendent of Schools.30/ The Board President offered a concept paper which contained the outlines of a strategy for addressing some of the problems associated with the MCPS' inability to provide an adequate education to many Hispanic and Black students. At last, some of the recommendations made earlier by the MRMC and the CMRMC as well as other interested groups may be considered.

The CMRMC applauds the initiative put forth by the Board President. It is hoped that there will be a strong, adequately funded, and continuing commitment to understand the problems in their starkest detail and the willingness to begin working immediately to correct them. However, after such a long period of virtually no effort to address the problems, they have indeed reached crisis proportions, certainly for the students who are being short-changed of a quality education. In light of the interest expressed by the BOE recently, the CMRMC will offer additional recommendations based on its work efforts during the 1982-83 school year. The Committee is optomistic that this time they will be used, if not by the Board, by the Minority Communities which are affected.

30/ See Blair G. Ewing's memorandum dated June 27, 1983, titled "Next Steps for Improving the Education of Minority Children.

Recommendations in Testing and Learning: 1) The CMRMC recommends a moratorium on the adoption of any new testing programs for the forseeable future. It is better to be certain of the validity, usefulness, and appropriateness of existing tests before adding to or deleting from them. The current testing program should be used as an indicator of how well subjects are being taught and absorbed, and as a result where changes are needed. Significant changes in the MCPS standardized testing program would prevent that from happening in the near-term.

2) The CMRMC believes that it is timely and appropriate for MCPS to link into industry and other high technology organizations for assistance in preparing instructors to teach students who are encountering difficulty in their studies. The learning curve on the effective dissemination of subject matter has risen quite sharply in the private sector during the past decade, and the school system should take advantage of this acquired knowledge.

3) The MCPS system seems to have more difficulty meeting the educational needs of Black male students than any of its other sub-populations. There is an urgent need to learn why this is the case and to develop a strategy for correcting this problem. The problem with Black male students begins during the early years of the school experience, and it is inescapable that it inteferres with the learning process. This matter requires immediate attention by parents and it is hoped, the School System.

4) Utilizing test results, review the strengths and weaknesses of the support system designed to help students encountering academic difficulty. Ensure that the support system is capable of quickly identifying those who need supplemental help, can specify the help needed, and deliver the assistance required. Eliminate as much discretion in making the decision whether to offer help as possible. For example, automatically require all students who score below an established minimum in reading and math standardized tests to be assigned to the Educational Management Team (EMT) for evaluation and assistance. The score alone is basis for the assignment, not an individual's judgement.

Recommendations on Suspensions: The CMRMC believes that the problem of student suspensions is badly out of balance and maybe out of control in MCPS. The disparity in the treatment of students, principally males, is so serious as to call into question the entire system of student behavior

management. In an effort to redress the imbalance and restore some amount of credibility to the process, the Committee strongly recommends that a "work group" made up of professional educators from outside the county school system, and preferably outside of the State, educators from within the MCPS system, parents, students and community representatives be commissioned to review the present policies and practices, and define a new approach to the problem.

Tinkering at the margin will not provide solutions to the problem. Furthermore, the Committee believes that it will be difficult if not impossible for the system to correct itself. It has failed to do so up to this point and there is little reason to believe that it will in the immediate future. It will require courage to seek help on this problem from the outside, but the failure to address the problem effectively, immediately, will likely exact a higher cost than that incurred in following this recommendation.

Recommendations on Extracurricular Activities: The CMRMC makes its recommendation on extracurricular activities specifically to the parents and organizations with a vested interest in the educational development of minority students. The point was made in the text of the discussion on extracurricular activities that by the analysis done on the numbers compiled by MCPS, there is a pattern of practices which systematically deny to many minority students educational opportunities which they are entitled to receive. Although the decisions made on student participation are at the individual school level, they aggregate to a composite which clearly show that for all practical purposes, many activities are effectively closed to minority students.

The Committee recommends that a broad-based parent's organization determine if the position set forth in this paper is correct, and if the answer is yes, to seek legal remedies to redress the problem. It appears that this is an area where a very substantial case can be made that minority children are harmed by current practices beyond any doubt, and that the MCPS system has to ultimately be held accountable for the damage sustained by the students. The CMRMC will work with any community organization which takes action on this grievance.

Recommendations on the Gifted and Talented Program: On July 14, 1983, Secretary T. H. Bell of the U.S. Department of Education stated that "academically talented minority students from poor families have gotten a 'raw deal' in the nation's public schools . . . ."31/ He further stated that the residual harm of racial discrimination is responsible in part for the "dismal record at educating talented low-income students. Since most low-income people are minorities, it tends to work against low-income minority kids. The kid who loses the most is the achiever who can't rub shoulders with intellectual peers".32/

The statement by Secretary Bell just about says it all -- it is as graphic a description of what the CMRMC has found in the MCPS program for the gifted and talented as is likely to be seen anywhere. After years of rosy promises on this matter, always followed by a lack of progress, the Committee recommends as it did with the extracurricular activities that a solution be sought through a "class-action" effort by parents and community organizations.

It will likely be more difficult to prove a pattern of practices which adversely affects minority students in this instance than in the case of extracurricular program activities, but it is not considered by the CMRMC to be an impossible task. The gifted and talented program does not operate in all schools across the system, but where it does operate the aggregate numbers are unequivocally clear and bad. The Committee recommends that the minority parents and organizations address this problem through its own initiatives.

31/ The Washington Post, "Raw Deal for Minority Students Seen" July 15, 1983. P. A3.

32/ Ibid.

VIII. Conclusions

The CMRMC is an organization largely made up of parents who have a keen interest in the education of children in Montgomery County Public Schools. As stated before, the members of the Committee do not hold credentials in the field of education, but have made an effort to understand the nature and causes of the problems facing some minority children as they attempt to get an education in the school system.

The Committee readily acknowledges that there is much which it does not know about the theories, practices, policies and regulations employed in the administration of a large school system. But the parents on the Committee and others who have talked to the CMRMC membership over the years do know what the system is legally obligated to do for their children, and many feel that there is a significant gap between what MCPS are supposed to do and what they are actually doing. Furthermore, all of the parents the Committee has dealt with do care deeply about the quality of education and personal development their children are receiving.

If the Committee were to summarize the overwhelming view of parents and students which it has been in touch with over the recent years it would simply state that many minority children are "at-risk" in the sense that there are factors at work which prevent far too many of them from receiving the educational opportunities, subject matter grades, and standardized test scores which will enable them to fulfill their ambitions for further study at higher education institutions of their choice, and entry to jobs and other promising career opportunities when they are finished in the school system. Fortunately, it is not necessary to be a professional educator to know when a school system is doing well for its students or badly for that matter.

By now many residents of Montgomery County must know that more than half of all Black and Hispanic ninth graders failed the basic math competency examination during the 1982-83 school year -- and other such stories. Furthermore, it is likely that a large percentage of County residents would have sound proposals to offer for dealing with the educational crisis facing minority youngsters.

The MCRMC has arrived at one approach to resolving some of the impediments to the proper education of minority children which it would very much like to see utilized. Despite all of the gaps in our knowledge about the "tracking of students" and the funneling of many away from advanced preparation to basic courses, and notwithstanding the initiative which the President of the BOE introduced on June 27, 1983, the CMRMC believes that the ultimate solution must come from the people who are so adversely affected. Black and Hispanic parents must find the resolve to make MCPS work to the benefit of their children.

The changes needed in order to make the school system responsive to the educational needs of the minority as well as the majority are large and far reaching. We are all mindful of the fact that few bureaucracies voluntarily reform themselves. Furthermore, we are now aware of the fact that a few parents can not bring about the needed changes, nor can one or two organizations no matter how well-intentioned. The CMRMC firmly believes that a merging and coalescing of people -- parents and organizations community wide -- speaking with one voice as an advocate for students and as an adversary to the system which short-changes them, is the real solution. It is time for the minority community to assume the ultimate responsibility for the education of its children. No -- it is past the time for it.

Acknowledgements

The CMRMC received significant support from several organizations in Montgomery County during the 1982-83 school year. As a matter of fact this report could not have been developed and written without the help which came from civic, social, and a wide range of other community organizations.

The Committee is deeply indebted to the National Council of Negro Women, the League of Women Voters, the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, the Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, and the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity for their analyses and writing on special issues in conjunction with the preparation of this report. The Unitarian Church of Rockville also made an important contribution to the work of the Committee.

The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Montgomery County Branch, continued its strong commitment toward achieving improved educational opportunities for Black students by supporting the CMRMC, as it has done ever since the Committee was created.

Of course, many individuals have given support and encouragement to the work of the Committee, for which we are deeply grateful. Parents, teachers, Board members, administrators and students are all due the credit for whatever progress has been achieved through the work of the CMRMC. The Committee assumes full responsibility for the shortcomings which are evident in this report.